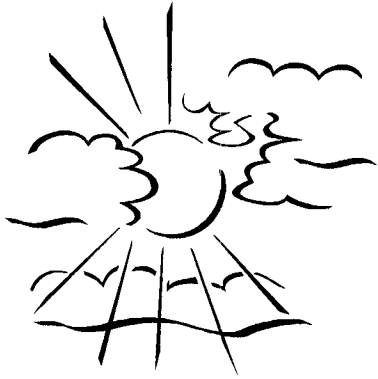


***Department
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Human
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Articles in Today's Clips

Friday, April 14, 2006

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Local columnists

ROCHELLE RILEY: Former foster youths to the rescue

April 14, 2006

BY ROCHELLE RILEY
FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

Jessica Lindsey remembers her first time in foster care. She was 14, placed in a home on Detroit's west side and didn't see her mother for three weeks because Mom was on the east side and neither knew how to get across town.

Mona Perdue remembers being homeless and moving from one house to another with her mother, brother and boyfriend. But she still graduated with honors -- on time, she says proudly -- from Martin Luther King Jr. High in Detroit.

When Jessica and Mona met this week with a national consultant trying to improve the transition period for young people who "age out" of foster care, it was clear they knew more about the issue than everyone else at the table.

Both are paid foster advocates. Yet, that still isn't enough. So in a move born of entrepreneurial spirit and necessity, they and Jonnie Hill -- a single mother who also works for a Detroit foster youth advocacy group -- are forming a new organization to serve as a bridge between foster youth and the Michigan Department of Human Services.

"We want to provide those services that the state misses out on," Jessica said. "We want to provide stability and caring for foster youth as well as youth who are homeless."

Their group, to be called

MYFACE (for Michigan Youth Fostering A Change Everywhere), would offer help with housing, scholarships and counseling for young people who are essentially put out on their own when they get too old for foster care. Most important, MYFACE would be a single source for a variety of help.

"Our dream goal is to have a one-stop center where we provide psychological and educational and family counseling, instead of youth having to chase different threads to get help," Jessica said.

In Michigan, most young adults who leave the foster care system are not aware of available resources, including transition funds to help with rent and furniture. The state has stepped up efforts to spread the word, but it's hard, because the state does not track the youths once they age out. MYFACE would not compete with the state but would seek a contract from the state to bundle resources into one package. It would also apply for grants and seek donations from corporations interested in developing future employees.

On a mission to change system

Jessica, Mona and Jonnie, along with Traverse City advocates Bill Schramm and Shawn Semelsberger, are part of a national movement of young leaders on foster transitions. Jessica, Shawn and Bill are members of the National Foster Youth Advisory Council, which is sponsored by the Child Welfare League of America.

They also all work on state youth boards funded by the national Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative. The advocates meet with elected officials and fight for change. Michigan received its first Casey grants in 2001 and now has 13 boards in 17 counties.

"I think that the youth boards give us some hope that if we follow through on the issues that they're raising, we will have a much stronger way to launch children ... into adulthood," said Susan Kelly, a senior associate at the private, nonprofit Center for the Study of Social Policy in Washington, D.C., who works with Wayne County youth.

"If I've learned anything," Kelly said, "it is how much more there is to do. What the youth themselves have done is to not let us forget their faces, their individual stories, the need to do better by them."

The Casey youth boards recently released a list of recommendations, called Voice, that detail their needs, including: allowing foster youth to participate in decision-making, ensuring that foster youth stay connected with their families, providing foster youth with transition savings accounts, recruiting more foster families so youth don't have to move so far from their homes, and providing foster youth with transportation, a major challenge in metro Detroit.

They recently met with Gov. Jennifer Granholm and her cabinet members, who were visibly moved by their stories and their outreach.

JJ Hitch, president of the year-old Macomb County foster youth board, SPIRIT (Spectacular People in Real Inspiring Transformations), praised the Detroit advocates' idea of an agency to bundle all services. But he went a step further.

"If we can pull together and have a statewide system, that would be great," said the 19-year-old Oakland University freshman. "Even after you age out, you're not necessarily going to stay within your county, and it's hard to use the resources from the county you used to live in. You have to have a blanket effect."

JJ, who lives in Almont and plans to be a politician some day, entered the system after his parents divorced when he was 14. He was placed with his grandparents and has lived with them ever since. His youth board, SPIRIT, sends birthday cards to foster youth when they turn 14 and are eligible for aid.

Changing lives for the better

State officials praised the youth boards and their recommendations, which include free tuition at state colleges and giving former foster kids first dibs on used state items such as computers and cars. They also were thrilled by the news that three former foster youths plan to start an agency that does what the defunct Michigan Foster and Adoptive Parent Association used to do.

"I think this demonstrates perfectly the creativity and strength of these young people and their desire to help other people in their same situation," said DHS spokeswoman Karen Stock. "This just shows the power of asking people who are involved what needs to be done. ... They are the ones that know."

All youth boards statewide have formed matching subcommittees to work on housing, education, employment, personal and community engagement and physical and mental health issues.

In Macomb, for instance, the housing subcommittee is building connections with local landlords to encourage them to give foster youth advance notice about available apartments, reduce security deposits and waive credit checks. The education subcommittee is looking for technical schools and colleges to provide more opportunities for former foster youth. The employment subcommittee is building partnerships with companies for summer jobs. The physical and mental health committee is working on exercises to build trust and connections.

Jessica said that she and her colleagues plan to ask JJ and other youth board leaders to help in their new organization

"It's a great idea," said Shawn, 20, who aged out of foster care two years ago and now works with the LOVE (Let Our Voices Echo) youth board in Traverse City.

"It's a very humbling experience, and sometimes it's a little surreal," she said of her youth board work. "While you're doing it, you're not comprehending the full scope of it. I'm changing people's lives."

An independent agency couldn't come at a better time. The Department of Human Services just announced that it plans to use much of its federal funding to try to keep families together instead of react to what happens when they fall apart.

With that shift, there may be a greater need, at least for a while, for transitional help. And the state doesn't need to hire more costly college graduates to help its aging-out population.

"Why would you pay someone with a degree who's out of touch when you have a plethora of young adults who have gone through the system and can reach out to these youth, who need employment right now?" asked Jessica. "Where they might pay one person \$50,000, we could pay three people \$15,000."

Wisdom through experience

Jessica was born in Atlanta but grew up in an apartment above a TV shop at Chene and Warren on Detroit's east side. She attended Campbell Elementary but transferred to Burton International, two bus rides away from her home, to get away from bullies. She tested into Cass, Renaissance and King, the city's most prestigious high schools, but attended Murray Wright with her friends. Problems at home led her at age 14 to be placed in foster care on the west side.

"My mother and me had never been past Woodward," Jessica said. "She didn't know how to catch the bus to get to me, and I didn't know how to take the bus to get back home."

Jessica went through eight placements, her behavior getting worse, then better as she grew up. She recalled one foster mom, who was a science teacher who lived in Southfield and worked in Detroit.

"She would drive past where my school was," Jessica said. "She would take me to Kettering High School and I'd sit in the back of her science class all day. It was ninth grade. If there's one thing I know, I know science."

Jessica moved out on her own at 18; she used a \$5,000 federal grant to buy a gold, 2000 Dodge Intrepid, which she named Princess. The engine blew, and now the car "is a square in a junkyard," she said. Jessica lived in Ypsilanti with a boyfriend, then moved back to Detroit. She lives alone, except for Scooter.

"He's a foster cat," she said. "First, he lived with Mona. Now he lives with me. Then he's getting ready to live with my mother. He's on his third placement. He needs some structure."

If anyone has learned something from foster care, it is Jessica, whose wisdom should be printed on a Bill of Rights and Responsibilities sent to every foster youth in the state.

"I didn't have a chance to figure out who I was. High school is when you figure out who you are, what your moral standards are, what kind of food you like and what kind of people you like ..." she said. "But the best part of me that has come from this has been learning that I'm greater than what I thought I was."

The importance of self-confidence

Mona was born in Detroit and grew up in the Warren-Conner area. While she was a student at Joy Middle School, her family was evicted and stayed with different friends.

"We were just moving around, house-hopping, so technically I was homeless," she said.

She was placed in foster care at 15 and stayed with relatives until she was 18. She then moved in with a boyfriend, but within months, was living with an aunt and uncle. She attended the Detroit Academy of Arts and Sciences, then the University of Detroit-Mercy. But she couldn't afford it; she now attends Wayne County Community College.

"My biggest challenge," she said, "was gaining confidence and self-esteem.

"It's hard when you have to pave your own road," she said. "Something good that came out of the situation is I realize I can't dwell on the fact that I had a negative experience. It's my responsibility to take care of my own life and not hold grudges. I have to be on my own person." On a recent evening at Jonnie's apartment, the trio worked on The Plan and an upcoming fund-raiser.

Jessica sat at the computer, Mona at her right hand, and Jonnie nearby with her daughter, Tania. If it were mid-afternoon, their apparent weariness might be taken for end-of-the-day, "I wish it was 5 o'clock" fatigue. But it's after 7, and every now and again it is clear that the flashes of tired also are painful flirts with memory, occasional glimpses into their past lives and the struggles that remain.

As Jessica made suggestions for an upcoming meeting with WJLB-FM (97.9) morning host Coco, she suddenly blurted out: "I've got to find a way to pay my rent."

She says it matter-of-factly, like, "Oh, we can't forget the mustard."

"I got an eviction notice," she said. "I have to pay it by Tuesday. If I can't do it, I'll have to move back in with my mother" -- the woman whose home she was removed from six years ago.

"... Oh," she said, referring to the fund-raiser, "and we need to talk to Mr. Fofo's about the chicken."

ROCHELLE RILEY'S columns are published on the Sunday Voices page and the Wednesday and Friday Other Voices page. Contact her at rriley99@freepress.com or 313-223-4473.

About this series

- This is the latest in a series of columns by Rochelle Riley on the challenges faced by foster children who age out of the state system and are too old to receive further help. Last year, 457 of the state's 18,959 foster youths aged out of the system. At 18, they are basically left on their own to find housing, transportation, jobs and health care. www.freep.com/rochelleriley. The series' final column will propose solutions to make this crucial transition easier, outline ways that anyone can help and revisit the young adults you've met. Link to previous installments of this series from the online version of this column at www.freep.com/rochelleriley.

Where to turn for help

- Foster youths 14 and over or who have aged out of the system and need help in Wayne County can call the **Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative** site at 313-456-1003 or **Creating Independence and Outcomes (CIAO)** at 313-628-2302. Former foster youths statewide can call **Department of Human Services Youth Coordinator Shannon Gibson** at 517-241-8904 to learn about the Youth in Transition program.

For more information about MYFACE, the resource service agency being formed by three former foster youths, Jessica Lindsey, Mona Perdue and Jonnie Hill, call 313-525-2339, 313-525-7006 or 313-729-4931.

Posted: 4-11-2006

Social workers see new software

By BRIAN MULHERIN
Ludington Daily News Staff Writer

Employees from the Department of Human Services (formerly Family Independent Agency) have heard promises before.

First there was "Automate in 88."

That computer system, with all of its 1980s technology, was delivered in 1998.

At present, employees have three separate computer systems for managing 46 different aid programs - almost all with an acronym people on the street wouldn't know.

On one screen, they enter "M" for male. On another, it's a "1."

That's just the tip of the iceberg. Imagine having to explain the familial relationships to three different systems using different codes each time.

They've also seen their ranks shrink. Since 2002, the Mason-Oceana DHS staff has dropped 26 percent, while caseloads have increased 23 percent.

So forgive them if they were a little skeptical on Monday as Bill Kennedy, the field lead for the Bridges program, gave them a presentation on an all-in-one solution to their needs.

Bridges is being touted as a replacement computer system for the state's three DHS systems - CIMS, ASSIST and LOA-2.

Kennedy told the workers he was there to "manage" their expectations and to tell them the truth.

"Historically, our agency has not done a real good job of bringing you new technology to reduce your workload," Kennedy told the 15 or so workers at the meeting.

Kennedy explained the state went through an exhaustive process of examining computer systems in other states, including California, Wyoming, Utah and Texas.

He said field personnel were involved in the hunt for the right technology and field personnel would be involved in the design phase of the program.

In the end, the state selected a system from Texas designed by Deloitte.

Employees raised questions about the Texas system because they had heard from friends, relatives and co-workers that the computer system there was not as good as advertised.

Kennedy said shortly after Deloitte designed the system for Texas, the state decided to privatize much of its aid structure, and the computer system was not designed for the use it was eventually put to. He said Michigan has no such plans to privatize.

One employee asked if the truth wasn't that the computer system made things easier to privatize and, as a result, cut staff?

The purpose of the system isn't to allow for staff cuts, Kennedy said, it's to allow workers to stop spending all of their time on the computer and to actually do casework, which is what they were hired to do.

"We've done the staffing reduction already," Kennedy said. "If Bridges saves 20-40 percent of the workload, we've got at least that much work that goes undone right now.

"There are no plans - again, no plans - to reduce the staffing levels because of Bridges."

The implementation of Bridges is scheduled to begin in 2007.

For Nancy Sterk, the director of Mason/Oceana DHS, October of 2007 can't get here soon enough.

"We just have less and less time and it's taking more time to get things processed," Sterk said. "People are calling and the more we take the calls, the less time we have to take care of the paperwork."

Sterk said although she's not sure her staffers have all come to believe in the new system, she thought the presentation alleviated some of their concerns.

"This time, I believe it," Sterk said of the Bridges system.

At this point, anything is an improvement.

"Right now, the staff are having to work so many systems and work-arounds and are so reliant on antique technology that they aren't able to devote the time to working with the clients and meeting with the clients one-one-one," she said. "They're bogged down with paperwork."

The Detroit News

Friday, April 14, 2006

James P. Hoffa

Health costs destroying our economy National health plan only way to protect workers and employers

Our nation is facing an urgent crisis. Companies, workers and all levels of our government have an equal stake in this fight. Our nation's health care system is broken. America must act now. General Motors Corp. is teetering on the edge of bankruptcy, and Delphi Corp. is already there, largely because of the amount of money they spend on health care for their employees. GM spends more on health care for its workers than on steel for its cars. GM estimates that it spends \$1,500 in health care costs for every car it produces. It paid out about \$5.8 billion for health care in 2005. That competitive disadvantage largely explains why the Big Three automakers have eliminated or announced plans to eliminate nearly 140,000 jobs since 2000.

All economic sectors hit

This problem is hitting all sectors of our economy.

Teamsters in Connecticut and Florida recently waged a six-week strike against Sikorsky Aircraft, a defense contractor that makes helicopters for the military. Sikorsky and its parent company, United Technologies Corp. (UTC), are tremendously successful companies in an industry that shows no signs of slowing down. UTC earned \$3.2 billion in 2005. Its chief executive officer, George David, collected more than \$53 million in total compensation in 2005.

But that did not stop Sikorsky from demanding that its 3,600 unionized workers pay twice as much for their health care co-payments in the first year of their contract and an additional 15 percent during the next two years.

The company said it was taking a stand because America's health care system is broken.

Sikorsky claimed to want to teach its employees a lesson about how much health care costs.

But the workers at Sikorsky understand the health care crisis very well. They offered to give up signing bonuses and accept smaller wage increases to help pay for their health care. Sikorsky refused to consider this and wouldn't even communicate with members of Congress from both parties, who encouraged them to negotiate in good faith.

Don't punish workers

In another fight for affordable health care, Teamster sanitation workers in New York were forced to strike last week against the highly profitable Waste Management Inc. These workers have the fifth-most dangerous job in the country, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, contending with all kinds of deadly risks.

How are they repaid for keeping our neighborhoods clean and disease free? Waste Management is trying to gut their health care benefits -- the very people who need it the most.

Men and women who work hard and play by the rules should never face this dilemma. In 2005, America spent more than \$2 trillion on health care, up from \$916 billion in 1993. One out of

every \$5 spent in this country will be spent on health care. Those are dollars that could be spent on education, housing, food, savings, retirement investments, bridges, highways and roads. Pretty soon, America won't have money left for anything else.

Too many go unprotected

Despite these increases -- and maybe even because of them -- there are now more than 46 million Americans without insurance. That's over 15 percent of the population. In 2000, it was 39 million, and it was 31 million in 1987, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

America is spending more and more on health care to cover fewer and fewer people poorly.

Health care costs are destroying our nation's economic edge. The cards are stacked against American companies as they try to compete with low-cost, low-wage foreign producers.

The only real solution to this crisis is national health care. Meeting such a basic need should not force government budgets, companies and workers into the red. As the crisis grows, more and more Americans, workers and corporate leaders alike, are calling for government action.

We invite General Motors, Delphi, Sikorsky, UTC, Waste Management and other corporations to stop fighting against us and start fighting along side us. It's time for all Americans to join this fight for a country that rewards hard work and where working families don't have to choose between going to the doctor and paying the rent.

James P. Hoffa is president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. Mail letters to The News, Editorial Page, 615 W. Lafayette, Detroit, MI 48226, fax them to (313) 222-6417 or e-mail them to letters@detnews.com.

MICHIGAN REPORT

Information Pertinent to Legislative and State
Department Activities Since 1906

REPORT NO. 71 VOLUME 45 THURSDAY, APRIL 13, 2006

MASSACHUSETTS HEALTH PLAN DRAWING STATE INTEREST

A newly-signed Massachusetts law requiring universal health insurance coverage for all residents has “changed the calculus” of the issue in Michigan, and officials here are going to watch with interest how the new system develops in the Bay State with an eye towards the future possibility of attempting a similar proposal here.

No one is yet willing to endorse a proposal similar to the Massachusetts plan here, but several people said the fact that a Democratic Legislature and Republican governor – and one with a Michigan connection – could reach agreement on the issue means a similar consensus could be reached in Michigan.

No matter who is governor a year from now, said Kevin Kelly of the Michigan State Medical Society, “universal coverage will be a topic.”

Governor Jennifer Granholm’s administration already is working on a proposal that could provide insurance coverage to some 500,000 uninsured Michigan residents. A spokesperson for the Department of Community Health said a proposal for universal coverage may be the next logical step for the state to consider.

But again, officials are proceeding cautiously, wanting to see how the system in Massachusetts gets up and running.

Senate Majority Floor Leader Sen. Bev Hammerstrom (R-Temperance) was in Boston last week for another purpose and spoke with a member of that state’s Senate about the universal coverage. “She was pretty excited about it, so I started paying more attention,” Ms. Hammerstrom said. “It’s an interesting concept.”

Rep. Ed Gaffney (R-Grosse Pointe Farms), chair of the House Health Policy Committee, said: “I’m kind of excited about it. I’m anxious to see it come through. Health care insurance shouldn’t only be for the rich.”

A spokesperson for the Democratic vice chair of the House committee, Rep. Stephen Adamini (D-Marquette), said he had requested a copy of the Massachusetts law and hopes to talk to administration officials about the proposal.

The law that Governor Mitt Romney, son of Michigan's former Governor George Romney, signed on Wednesday, would create a lower-cost state health insurance system and require residents who are not covered by other means to either purchase a low-cost policy or pay a state tax penalty. Mr. Romney vetoed a portion of the bill that would have required companies with 11 workers or more to provide health insurance.

While there has been controversy over the bill, with a number of economists questioning the true cost of the measure, it has also generated significant praise. An economics column in the New York Times said the legislation deals deftly with two critical components of universal coverage: the cost and ensuring that people actually have the coverage by assessing a penalty to those that do not acquire the coverage.

That is a provision that does have a number of people in Massachusetts worried, however. A recent national radio talk show heard from a number of people in the commonwealth, some unemployed, who questioned how they would be expected to pay for the required policy.

Ms. Granholm identified dealing with the uninsured as a priority in her January State of the State address. Her Michigan First proposal, which would require a federal waiver to implement, is slated to provide insurance coverage for about 500,000 people, half the estimated 1 million that are without coverage now.

While administration officials had hoped they would apply for the waiver at the end of April, the actual application will occur later as state and federal officials are still in discussions on the proposal.

T.J. Bucholz, spokesperson for DCH, said the administration's focus is now on the Michigan First proposal, but a universal coverage proposal could "be the next logical step."

While the dispute over universal coverage has long festered in national politics, Mr. Bucholz said a number of states now recognize the linkage between insurance coverage and overall health care and state costs.

The medical community is also intrigued by the proposal. Mr. Kelly said universal coverage is one of four themes the organization has chosen as part of its future of medicine program.

The society is also planning to create a workgroup on essential coverage, he said.

The Massachusetts act is important because it shows universal coverage can be accomplished on a bi-partisan basis, he said.

Finding a way to provide health insurance coverage is critical, Mr. Kelly said, because "when you have one million people without coverage it is tearing apart an already fragile system."

Kevin Downey, a spokesperson for the Michigan Health and Hospital Association, said his organization is still reviewing the law and has no official stance yet.

“The concept is a good one,” Mr. Downey said. “It makes more sense to address health care costs up front through prevention, health screenings, regular sources of primary care rather than the uninsured waiting for their conditions to worsen before seeking treatment.”

Mr. Gaffney said Mr. Romney supporting the bill does add to its intrigue. “Mitt Romney is a reasonable guy, a conservative guy,” he said.

Ms. Hammerstrom said there are some factors in Michigan that would have to be addressed before such a proposal could be adopted here. For example, Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Michigan is the state’s insurer of last resort and has tax benefits for that. How the company would be affected would have to be studied, she said.

And Ms. Hammerstrom said she is interested in finding a way to expand the use of health savings accounts, but making sure that those accounts remain practicable by not requiring deductibles so large they essentially provide no help to lower income individuals.

Man faces trial for allegedly attacking wife

Friday, April 14, 2006

By Lynn Turner

lturner@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8564

They had dinner at a Portage restaurant, but after returning to their cars, an Oshtemo Township woman, said her estranged husband grabbed her by the throat, bound her in duct tape and took her to an empty house in Kalamazoo where he sexually assaulted her.

Marvin Scott Horn, 39, of Kalamazoo Township, will stand trial for kidnapping and four counts of criminal-sexual conduct for the alleged attack on Jan. 27 and 28, Kalamazoo County District Judge Robert C. Kropf ruled Wednesday after a preliminary examination.

Horn could face up to life in prison if convicted.

Horn also was arraigned on a new charge -- solicitation of murder -- to which he pleaded not guilty. A preliminary hearing on that charge was scheduled for April 26.

Authorities said Horn asked someone who was getting out of jail to kill his wife. If convicted, Horn could face up to life in prison.

The estranged wife was the only person to testify Wednesday against Horn, who is being held on a \$250,000 bond.

After leaving the restaurant parking lot, Horn drove her to a house on Reed Street and forced her inside, she said. One room contained sleeping bags, a candle, a cooler and a knife, which he used to cut off the duct tape and her clothes, she said.

She said the knife was always within Horn's reach while he forced her into a variety of sex acts, although he never overtly threatened her with it.

The next morning, Horn returned her to her car in the restaurant parking lot, she told Kalamazoo County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Chris Ann Johnson. She called police later that afternoon.

Bay City Times

People's forum

Friday, April 14, 2006

Recycle cell phones

Voice: Greg Haller, president, Verizon Wireless' Michigan/Indiana/Kentucky Region, Detroit

The tools we use to communicate today are rapidly evolving. New wireless phones are introduced almost every day, and studies show that consumers upgrade and replace their phones about every 18 months. This Earth Day, you can make a difference in your community by recycling your old wireless phone, helping to keep the waste out of landfills and helping people in need at the same time.

Some say that it can be a challenge to find recycling resources or to find the time to sort old items. The good news is the process is quick and simple and today people have many options, other than the trash, for their old wireless phones.

One easy solution is Verizon Wireless' HopeLine program. HopeLine collects no-longer-used wireless phones and accessories from any service provider. The wireless phones and accessories that are collected at our local Verizon Wireless Communication Stores are refurbished or recycled in an environmentally safe way, with proceeds benefiting victims of **domestic violence** and the local nonprofit advocacy agencies that support them.

Earth Day is the perfect opportunity for you to get involved and help protect the Earth's resources. Recycling a phone may seem like a small step, but if we all take the time to recycle, we can help make a huge difference. So, on Earth Day 2006, do something good not only for the environment, but for our community, too.

25 years in fight against abuse

LACASA's work includes victim services, education

Friday, April 14, 2006

BY LISA CAROLIN

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

The LACASA building on Grand River Avenue west of Howell offers much more than the modestly sized facade would indicate. Inside, professional counselors and nurses work 24 hours a day, seven days a week with victims of sexual assault and abuse from throughout Livingston County.

LACASA's mission is to end domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse. The agency began working out of its current building in July 2002. April is Sexual Assault Awareness month, and LACASA had its inaugural Circle of Women luncheon recently to raise awareness and funds.

"We raised \$12,500 for LACASA at the luncheon and are very, very pleased," said Julie Smith, LACASA's development director.

LACASA celebrates its 25th anniversary this year.

"It's a full-service agency and we have clinical, shelter, and administrative services all in one building," said Director Judy Shewach, who explains that the agency works hard on prevention and education.

"We try to reach as many people as possible, including adolescents and children, and to identify issues, such as control, power and empowerment, and how not to repeat the cycle of violence." Smith says that with population growth comes growth in domestic violence. "During the 2004-2005 fiscal year, we saw nearly 160 victims of sexual assault."

Shewach says there are 30 people on LACASA's staff, and that all counselors have master's degrees and all legal advocates are college educated. There is a registered play therapist, and hundreds of volunteers. LACASA has programs in all five of the Livingston County-based school districts.

In October 2004, LACASA began its nurse examiner program for individuals 12 and older in need of urgent care in a private environment. It's called SANE, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner program, and specially trained forensic nurses gather evidence during a physical exam after a sexual assault.

"It's a benefit to survivors that they are able to get a nurse to spend time with them and to do a thorough exam," said one of those nurses, Jennifer Brown. "We're trained to look for evidence of sexual assault and to be expert witnesses in court."

Another program offered by LACASA is CARE, the Child Abuse Response Effort. Children who are alleged to be sexual assault victims, are interviewed in a neutral room that looks like a small living room with one-way glass. A trained forensic interviewer talks to the child while law enforcement officials and employees from Children's Protective Services can watch and listen from another room, and determine if a case will go to the next step.

"The advantage is that the child may only have to be interviewed once, and that every effort can be made to ease the child through the process," said Shewach, who adds that if a case is

prosecuted, the child will probably have to testify in court. "We have legal office staff who are here to explain to parents what is going on."

Shewach says that the agency averages 150 children a year who are interviewed through the CARE process.

The LACASA building also has a 20-bed shelter. It has six rooms that share one corridor as well as a bathroom and kitchen, and a room in a separate area for men, or as needed for women, with its own bathroom and kitchen. Shewach said the shelter is a full lock-down facility with security, and that includes a locked parking lot and a gated playground with an alarm system.

"Our goal is that everybody we see has a safety plan in place," says Shewach. "We work with the victim, friends and family, and do individual and group support counseling."

Shewach said LACASA does not charge for victim services. In addition to the shelter in the building, the agency also offers transitional housing in six 2-bedroom apartments scattered around the county that people can live in for up to two years.

Also located inside the agency's main facility is a children's center, which looks very much like a preschool. LACASA offers "free closets" for both children and adults with items such as clothing, books and toys, and there is a huge amount of storage in the building's basement where extra supplies are stored. The agency has a van, which it uses to transport people as needed to-and-from the facility.

LACASA's annual budget is \$1.1 million. Funding sources include federal, state and private grants, and the Livingston County United Way.

Nancy Rosso, executive director of the United Way says, "LACASA has a very strong presence and their services are recognized around the county. It is one of our largest agencies that receive funding from our programs and have for some time. We're fortunate to have them."

LACASA offers a 32-hour training program twice a year for volunteers, which enables them to do work with clients. There are hundreds of other volunteers who help with events such as the annual garden tour fundraiser.

"This is the most generous community in the world," said Shewach.

Jurors acquit father accused of shaking baby girl to death

Prosecutor says he may have been convicted had judge allowed manslaughter verdict

PUBLISHED: April 14, 2006

By Jameson Cook
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A jury decided Thursday that a Harrison Township man is innocent of abusing and killing his infant daughter while under his care in fall 2004.

Gary Wayne Lauzon, 32, walked away a free man Thursday afternoon after being charged with second-degree murder for the death of his daughter, Lea, who suffered injuries that prosecutors said were from shaking or an impact.

The jury deliberated in the Mount Clemens court building about 13 hours beginning late Tuesday afternoon following a several-day trial in front of Macomb Circuit Judge Edward Servitto. One juror was dismissed Wednesday and replaced Thursday by an alternate.

Assistant Macomb prosecutor Robert Merrelli said he believes a guilty verdict would have resulted if the judge had allowed the jury to consider manslaughter.

"They had difficulty believing he knowingly created a high risk of harm," which is an element of second-degree murder, he said.

"I still think manslaughter was appropriate," he said.

The jury seemed to believe it was an accident and followed jury instruction that "if it's an accident, he's not guilty," Merrelli said.

Defense attorney F. Patrick Talab could not be reached for comment Thursday afternoon.

The case featured scientific testimony for the prosecution and defense.

Merrelli pointed to the severity and type of injuries that county Medical Examiner Daniel Spitz and a pediatrician testified were caused by child abuse. Merrelli said the brain bleeding and swelling, along with "multi-layered" retinal bleeding were consistent with shaken baby syndrome, a violent shaking of a baby.

Defense medical experts testified that Lea could have died from an unknown "sudden death" condition.

Lauzon testified in his own defense that he did not harm the child but found her not breathing in he and his wife's bed and rushed her to Mount Clemens General Hospital.

Lauzon testified she could have suffered some of the injuries when he fell backward on a flight of stairs in his apartment building while carrying her in his arms and rushing her to the hospital.

His wife, Grace, who was not at home at the time, testified that she did not believe her husband of five months at the time could have harmed the child.

Several family members attended the proceedings in support of Lauzon.

Lea arrived at Mount Clemens General on Nov. 15, 2004, with no pulse and was revived by

emergency room physicians. She was taken to William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, where she arrived in a comatose state, never awoke and died eight days later.

Merrelli said the outcome of the case hasn't affected his belief in the legitimacy of the theory of shaken baby syndrome.

Jurors indicated they, too, gave little credence to defense experts who questioned it.

"They gave some credence to (Dr. John) Plunkett's testimony, but most of it they didn't," Merrelli said.

Merrelli noted that the majority of pediatricians believe in the shaken baby syndrome theory, even though some pediatricians and pathologists, including Plunkett, argue against.

"Plunkett and others have been advocating against it since 1999, and they remain a minority, and they haven't grown much," he said.

There have been at least three people in Macomb County convicted of murder or manslaughter for the death of an infant by shaken baby syndrome since 1999.

Man accused of having sex with girl he met online

Friday, April 14, 2006

By Robert C. Burns

MUSKEGON CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

A 20-year-old Muskegon man has been charged with having sex with an underage Kent County girl he met through an online chat room.

Justin Weatherly, 1012 W. Forest, communicated with the girl on a chat room aimed at young teens, Kent County Sheriff's Department authorities said.

They arranged for her to sneak out of her house and meet him early Sunday morning. He drove her to a remote area of Sparta Township and they had sex, according to a report of the incident. Although she went willingly with him, the girl is not old enough to provide consent for sex, under Michigan law.

Sgt. Roger Parent, spokesman for the Kent County department, said the girl came forward Tuesday and related the incident to a female detective.

Weatherly was arraigned in Kent County on two counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct, involving sex with an underage person, using a computer to commit a crime and related charges - five felonies in all.

A preliminary examination was scheduled for April 25.

Weatherly has no criminal history, Parent said. However, during their investigation of the incident, authorities found child pornography on his computer, he said.

"Some good investigative leads came together," Parent said. He declined to discuss specifics of the investigation that led to Weatherly's arrest.

Parent said the incident underscores the need for parents to be aware of their children's Internet activity and where it might lead.

"Parents must talk to their children about Internet safety," he said.

Man who ran program for teens in Michigan charged in Minnesota

4/13/2006, 9:41 a.m. ET

The Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The former executive director of a Minneapolis agency that works with children and families has been charged with sexually assaulting a teenager.

Police say the abuse began in 2002 and the teenager was known to Richard C. Pahl Jr., 44, but not through his work with the nonprofit human services agency Freeport West. He was fired Tuesday, said Kathryn Rosebear, its development director.

A criminal complaint filed Tuesday said a search of Pahl's Eden Prairie house yielded 18 binders with pictures of naked boys from ages 5 to 16. Many of them were engaged in sexual activity with other children. Police said they didn't know who produced the images.

Authorities also found nude photos of the teenage victim and another boy.

"We are deeply concerned about the well-being physically and mentally of the victim in this case," Eden Prairie police Sgt. Robert Olson said. "In my experience I have never seen this quantity of child pornography in one place."

Pahl was charged in Hennepin County District Court with third-degree criminal sexual conduct. He was the executive director of a home for abused children, the Link Crisis Intervention Center in St. Joseph, Mich., for 10 years before leaving in December, WSJM-AM of St. Joseph/Benton Harbor reported.

He never had any contact with children at Freeport, where he had begun working in January, Rosebear told the Star Tribune. "We had no indication of this at all. It's a tough situation," she said.

Pahl does not have a criminal history, Olson said.

Police: Abuse by ex-LINK director Pahl began here Officials will try to determine if local kids are depicted in explicit photos

By JULIE SWIDWA
St. Joseph H-PStaff Writer

After police looked at binders containing sexually explicit pictures of children, the former director of a Berrien County children's shelter put his hands behind his back to be handcuffed, a police spokesman said.

Richard "Rick" Pahl Jr., who for 11 years until December headed the LINK, a shelter for troubled children, was arrested at his Eden Prairie, Minn., home Sunday night, police said. Berrien County authorities will try to determine whether the pictures of naked children found in 18 binders at Pahl's suburban Minneapolis home depict children from Southwest Michigan. Police in Minnesota said in a written report that at least one boy pictured is from Michigan. Pahl, 44, was arrested by Eden Prairie police Sunday night after one of his adopted sons, a young man who no longer lives with Pahl, called police to say Pahl was abusing his 16-year-old halfbrother. The 16-year-old lives with Pahl and also was adopted by him. Police said Pahl is not married.

Pat Brink, communications manager for the Eden Prairie Police Department, said Pahl was arrested after the 16-year-old son showed police the binders full of photographs of naked children ranging in age from 5-16, many engaged in sexual activity with one another. Brink said Pahl was arrested without incident. "When he was taken into custody on Sunday, after the officer looked at the photos, all he did was put his hands behind his back to be arrested," Brink said. Pahl was formally charged in a Hennepin County court Tuesday with third-degree criminal sexual conduct and jailed on a \$50,000 bond. If convicted, he faces up to 15 years in prison.

Berrien County Prosecutor Jim Cherry said Thursday that in Berrien County the Sheriff's Department and Stevensville and Benton Township police departments are investigating. Because the case is open, he would not comment further. "We don't comment about criminal investigations while they're proceeding," Cherry said.

Brink said Pahl was fired Tuesday from his job as director of Freeport West, a facility for troubled youth in the St. Paul and Minneapolis areas.

"In his capacity there he did not have direct contact with children," Brink said.

But in Berrien County, Pahl counseled many hundreds of children while working at the LINK, a shelter for troubled children who, for any one of a variety of reasons, cannot stay at home. Parents can refer their children to the LINK, or children in crisis can seek shelter there themselves.

The youngsters fall into one of two categories: A child is in the midst of a family crisis, and the parents and the child both need time to regroup, or a child is homeless due to abuse or neglect and is awaiting placement in the foster care system.

The LINK offers counseling and shelter services to children ages 9-17 from Berrien, Cass and Van Buren counties. In 2004 it became part of Child and Family Services of Southwestern Michigan, a child placement agency. Both are housed in a complex on Michigan 139 in Benton Township.

Karen Olson, executive director of Child & Family Services, said administrators there were told Tuesday about the charges against Pahl. She denied a radio report that Pahl left the LINK "abruptly" in December.

She said he submitted a letter of resignation Nov. 2, saying he had accepted a job as executive director of Freeport West in Minneapolis. He worked at the LINK until Dec. 22, Olson said. "We are cooperating fully with law enforcement officials in their investigation," Olson said in a news release. She would not comment further.

Police have not determined whether Pahl took the photographs found in the binders in his closet. At Pahl's home Sunday evening, his 16-year-old son told police that abuse, including oral and anal sex, has been happening since he was adopted by Pahl in 2002. The boy told police that one of the assaults occurred while he and Pahl were visiting relatives in Michigan during March. "Here in Eden Prairie, we're deeply concerned about the physical and mental well-being of the victim," Brink said. He said the child has been turned over to protective services in Hennepin County.

Police said Pahl had lived alone with the 16-year-old boy in Eden Prairie since January, and the other adopted son had stayed behind in Michigan.

Brink said that as of Thursday morning Eden Prairie police had not determined who took the photographs found in the binders in Pahl's closet.

According to an Eden Prairie police report, there were naked pictures of Pahl's 16-year-old son and a young friend who lives in Michigan.

Capt. Dave Chandler of the Berrien County Sheriff's Department said Minnesota police were coming to Berrien County Thursday to meet with local authorities.

Brink said in addition to the photos, police seized sexual devices, pornographic magazines depicting children and extensive computer equipment from Pahl's home in Minnesota. "We'll be working with Berrien County officials to see what they know or don't know and try to figure out who the children are in these photos," Brink said. "We don't believe any other abuse took place here in Minnesota. It's likely it took place there, or they could be downloaded images." Elvin Gonzalez, Berrien County Trial Court Family Division administrator, said he never worked directly with Pahl but knew him through membership on a local board.

"I was surprised by the news, and deeply concerned. These are very serious allegations, and given what his role was in the Berrien County community, these allegations are of great concern to anybody who knew him," Gonzalez said.

"You would hope and expect that leaders of organizations that work with youth and family are above reproach, and you would hope to have a high degree of confidence in someone with oversight of an agency that works with kids who are vulnerable," he said.

In a Herald-Palladium interview in December before leaving the LINK to work in Minnesota, Pahl said that over the years he counseled an estimated 2,500 children who came to the LINK for help.

He said he had decided to take the job at Freeport West because he wanted to make a difference on a larger scale, and the job would be in a larger setting with more opportunity.

For years the LINK was located inside the historic Chapin Hall on State Street in St. Joseph before moving in 2004 to a building on Michigan 139 in Benton Township.

During a Herald-Palladium interview at the time of the move to the new facility, Pahl said the new 14-bed shelter would provide double-occupancy bedrooms. He said the old shelter had just two bedrooms that accommodated groups of four and six children.

Pahl also said the new facility was wired with a Web-based security system that could be monitored from the intake office, administrative office or the director's home.

Bond not allowed, yet

Friday, April 14, 2006

JOE SNAPPER
THE SAGINAW NEWS

A 13-year-old accused of trying to kill a Saginaw police officer will remain in custody as a result of prosecutors fighting Thursday to keep him from going free.

Bond for the teen is 10 percent of \$140,000, which his mother had planned to post through an obscure law allowing payment of one-quarter of the 10 percent, authorities said.

Saginaw County Prosecutor Michael D. Thomas arrived at Probate Court to argue a motion to keep the teen in the Juvenile Detention Center.

The court, too busy for arguments, placed a hold on the teen's bond until a date when both sides can argue the motion in full.

Accused of pointing a loaded handgun at Officers Diane Ifill and Oscar Lopez on March 4, the teen has remained in detention since doctors released him from treatment for a bullet wound he suffered when Lopez shot him once in the abdomen.

Police have called the shooting justified.

The teen faces charges of assault with intent to commit murder of Officer Diane Ifill and/or Officer Oscar Lopez; felonious assault against Ifill and/or Lopez; carrying a concealed weapon; and two counts of possessing a firearm while committing a felony.

Authorities said the teen held a gun to Ifill's head and vowed to kill her during a scuffle at North Webster and Hayes. Lopez shot the youth and stopped the scuffle, police said.

Published April 14, 2006

[From the Lansing State Journal]

Reginald Carter: Don't rush into entry system

In theory, it sounds simple and appealing. Michigan could create a "Single Point of Entry" system that would give seniors easier, less-confusing access to all of the long-term care services available to them in Michigan.

In her March 23 Viewpoint ("Single Point of Entry is a must for Michigan"), Melinda Haus makes some good points about SPEs. What we do not know, however, is if an SPE can and will work in Michigan and whether it's worth the nearly \$61 million it is estimated to cost to implement the system.

Currently, the state is running a two-year pilot project to determine if an SPE can work. Many questions must be answered during the pilot project:

- Where will the funds come from to implement, operate and evaluate a statewide SPE network?

Since 1996, Medicaid health care services have been cut by more than \$621 million. Perhaps the governor and Legislature are willing to redirect funds from other government programs and services to restore the massive Medicaid cuts and to create an SPE.

- Which state agency or bureau will run the SPE? Or, do we need to create a new state agency? Where will the funds come from?

If implemented, will the SPE increase costs and divert Medicaid resources away from direct patient care?

- Exactly what services and programs would be organized under an SPE? Perhaps it would be beneficial to create SPEs for all government-run health care programs.

Legislation is pending in the state House (House Bill 5389) to implement an SPE system in about two years. Before the Legislature rushes to pass the bill and spend \$61 million that the state obviously does not have, it would be wise to complete the SPE pilot project to see what works, what doesn't, and whether it is the best policy for Michigan's senior citizens and taxpayers.

Reginald Carter is president of the Health Care Association of Michigan, a trade group for the long-term-care industry.

Meals on Wheels struggles

Program for seniors faces short funds, management questions

Friday, April 14, 2006

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

A program many local senior citizens depend on for a hot meal every day is struggling to clean up its own plate of troubles.

A budget deficit and confusion about how it operates have hounded the Livingston County Senior Nutrition Program for the last six months.

Cuts have been made, contributions sought and questions answered, and those involved with the program, commonly known as Meals on Wheels, hope it can get back to its main business, which is feeding the elderly.

"The bottom line is that we cannot lose focus on that," said Bill Rogers, chairman of the Livingston County Board of Commissioners. "When it comes to making good, nutritional meals and delivering them to the people who need them, it's a great program."

However, a budget deficit of nearly \$23,000 in 2005 and subsequent requests for financial help from executive director Margaret Davey to all Livingston County townships, villages and cities raised more concerns about the management of Meals on Wheels than it did money.

Who's in charge?

One of the questions commonly asked by those tapped to contribute to Meals on Wheels is, who is responsible for running the program?

Congregate meals, served at six county senior citizens centers, and meals delivered to those who aren't able to leave home due to advanced age or health problems are funded through the Older Americans Act of 1965.

The Livingston County program gets about \$441,000 annually in state and federal funds. They are distributed by the Area Agency on Aging 1-B through Community Outreach Services Corp., organized by the Community of Christ Church in Detroit in 1978 to provide services and housing for elderly people. This nonprofit group has had a 16-year contract with Davey, owner of a for-profit Commerce Township company called Paragon Management Inc., to run Meals on Wheels. Two additional nutrition programs administered by AAA 1-B are managed by for-profit companies, said Tina Abbate Marzolf, its director of contract and purchasing services.

Hiring for-profit companies to manage nonprofit programs is acceptable under federal guidelines and AAA 1-B receives approval from the state Office of Services to the Aging before contracting with any for-profit company, Abbate Marzolf said.

Paragon is paid \$45,000 annually to oversee the Livingston County program, which includes everything from recruiting volunteers, ordering food and preparing menus to preparing budgets and providing monthly and quarterly reports and financial statements to AAA 1-B. It has 35 employees, five of whom are full time.

Meals on Wheels prepares up to 500 meals for seniors each day, five days a week. It pays six people who work at the senior centers \$160 a week each to oversee the serving of congregate meals and dispatch of home-delivered meals.

The money crunch

Besides state and federal funds, Meals on Wheels also receives money and office space at 2300 E. Grand River Ave. in Howell from the county board.

In three years, the program's federal funds have been cut by \$8,000, and AAA 1-B officials said Meals on Wheels can expect another 1 percent to 2 percent decrease next year. Faced with its own budget problems, the county also cut its cash contribution from \$45,000 in 2004 to \$42,000 last year.

The Livingston County program also was hit when Hurricane Katrina prompted increases in oil prices. Food costs went up 5 percent and costs for petroleum-based supplies, such as Styrofoam food containers, went up 49 percent in 2005, Davey said.

On top of that, higher prices at the gas pump prompted a drop in volunteer Meals on Wheels drivers from 120 in November 2004 to 30 last August, Davey said.

"This is the roughest situation I've ever been through," she said. "I believe we do a good job managing the budget, but there are some things you just can't control."

Seniors served by Meals on Wheels are asked to donate \$2.25 per meal, but none are turned away for inability to pay, Davey said. In 2005, though, the average participant contribution was \$1.40 per meal, she said.

Meals on Wheels took in \$894,301 in 2005 and spent \$917,235. The resulting deficit prompted cuts, which included scaling back home-delivered meals from one hot meal and one sack lunch every weekday to just one hot meal every weekday. Weekend meals also were eliminated.

Davey also eliminated the full-time program director job in December and replaced it with a part-time program office manager position. The move has saved about \$25,000 in salary and benefits so far, she said.

Asking for help

Last month, Davey asked county commissioners for another \$17,000 to facilitate a kitchen move from the Masonic Hall in Pinckney to the Hartland Educational Support Service Center in the old Hartland High School.

The move was necessary, Davey said, because a new lease at the hall required a \$1,000-per-month rent hike plus payment of 77 percent of the building's utilities. Commissioners gave Meals on Wheels about \$11,600.

"The program has had at least three kitchen moves in the last eight years," Block said. "We've helped it move, but there's a fine line about how many times we can keep doing that. We know the program must be monitored more closely, and we need to continue to ask more questions."

Davey's requests for contributions from Livingston County municipalities has brought in a little money. Her accountant, Janeen Wiltse, did one-, three- and five-year program budget projections and asked communities to contribute a pro-rata share based on the 2000 U.S. Census-determined number of people age 60 and over living there.

The total was nearly \$138,000. Putnam Township gave \$5,700, Oceola Township gave \$5,222, Marion and Handy Townships gave \$1,000 each and Deerfield Township gave \$500 for a total of \$13,422.

Foundation grants, charitable contributions and funds raised by groups, such as Brighton's American Spirit Center, have brought in enough to erase last year's deficit, Davey said, but she estimates it will take an additional nearly \$60,000 to restore all meal service.

To make a contribution to the Livingston County Senior Nutrition Program, call its Howell office at 517-545-7198.

Apr 14, 7:39 AM EDT

700 Michigan employees earn \$100,000 plus

LANSING, Mich. (AP) -- The number of Michigan state employees who get a salary of at least \$100,000 a year has risen to about 700 from about 375 six years ago.

Topping the list is state economic development chief James Epolito at \$200,000 a year. Gov. Jennifer Granholm is No. 2 on the list at \$177,000 a year.

The third-highest paid state employee is state schools Superintendent Michael Flanagan at \$168,300 a year. No. 4 is Sandy Ring, Michigan Economic Development Corp. business development director, at \$154,500.

Three others tied for fifth place - state Surgeon General Kimberlydawn Wisdom, Community Health Department psychiatrist Shobhana Joshi and Corrections Department doctor George Pramstaller. Each got \$153,927.

The Detroit News received the salary information through a state Freedom of Information Act request.

Twelve of the top 21 salary earners are psychiatrists with the Community Health Department. Department spokesman T.J. Bucholz said it needs to pay the high salaries to get talented people to work for the state.

"To remain competitive, we have to offer higher-than-average state salaries to attract people with these kind of skills," Bucholz told the News for a story Friday.

The head of one watchdog group criticized the salaries.

"The state needs to have its wings clipped," said Rose Bogaert, chairwoman of the Wayne County Taxpayers Association. "The state is showing no restraint. ... While people in public-sector jobs are gaining, those losing jobs are in the private sector, and they're the ones expected to pick up the bill."

Epolito may be the highest-paid state employee, but he took a pay cut when he left his job as chief executive of the Accident Fund, a Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Michigan subsidiary, said Michigan Economic Development Corp. spokesman Mike Shore.

"Many of these jobs require people in highly competitive fields," Shore said. "In the last two years, we've lost three managers and three rising stars to higher-paying jobs elsewhere. These are talented people recognized in their field."

In all, 19 of the agency's employees earn at least \$100,000 a year.

Two members of the Legislature have six-figure salaries - House Speaker Craig DeRoche, R- Novi, at \$106,650, and Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming, at \$105,650.

Information from: The Detroit News, <http://www.detnews.com>

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